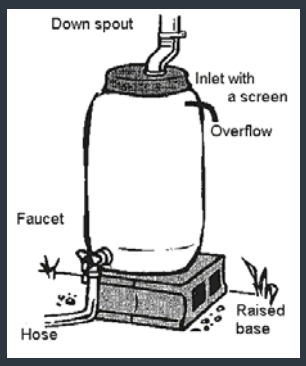
Facts About Rain Barrels

What's in a Rain Barrel?

Simply put—simple pieces. A large plastic, food grade, barrel, a spigot, overflow pipe, garden hose section, and an inlet with a screen. A rain barrel can be as simple or complex as you want to make.

This diagram illustrates a simple rain barrel:



Plastic rain barrels can be given your own artistic touch by using plastic grade paint. Decorating your rain barrel not only personalizes it for you but is a great creative outlet for you and your family.

What is a Rain Barrel?

Rain barrels are used to collect rain from the roof top for use later for things like lawn and garden watering. It is recommended that the water be used for outdoor purposes only. You may be surprised by the amount of water you collect—it only takes 1/10th of an inch of rain on 1,000 square feet of rooftop to fill a 50 gallon rain barrel.

The water you collect would normally flow from your downspout, onto your yard or paved surface and eventually to a storm drain.

Why Rain Barrels?

Storm water runoff is the largest source of pollution to our surface streams and Karst groundwater flows. If flushes toxic and noxious compounds that have been deposited on the ground and impervious surfaces. These pollutants can be deposited by improper disposal, accidental spills, washing/rinsing activities, lawn chemicals, and deposition of air-borne pollutants. This concoction of pollutants become dissolved in, or carried off by, overland storm water flow that may find its way into the surface water or groundwater. The highest concentration of these pollutants is flushed from the surfaces where they were deposited in the first few minutes of a rain storm. However, if rainwater can be retained where it falls, overland transport of pollutants can be reduced.

Rain barrels reduce the amount of storm water that enters your local storm water ditches, drains, culverts, and sinkholes. This will help keep the cost of managing local storm water down.

Bowling Green Rain Barrel Partners

- Kentucky Division of Water
- Warren County Division of Stormwater Management
- City of Bowling Green
- UK Cooperative Extension—Warren County
- BGGreen Partnership for a Sustainable Community
- Bowling Green Municipal Utilities
- Lost River Cave
- Central Kentucky P.R.I.D.E.
- KY Waterways Alliance

What Can Rain Barrels do for Me?

Rain barrels can offer some relief during periods of drought and low rainfall. The rain barrel stores all the water discharged by your downspout, which collects all the rain that falls on a large section of your roof. You may be able to supply the equivalent of an inch of rain to your garden or landscaping from only light rain. In fact your plants prefer rainwater to water that has been treated for use as drinking water.

Rain barrels can also reduce the amount of treated water that you have to buy from your public water utility. In addition, using rain water instead of drinking water reduces the demand on your local drinking water utility, thereby saving them chemicals and power costs. This helps to keep water costs down. When costs go up they have to be passed on to the users, so saving the utility company money saves you money in the long run.

Tips for Installation

- Place the rain barrel on a firm, level surface (i.e. cinder blocks or platform from treated exterior wood) so that it does not begin to lean when the ground is wet and the barrel is full. Your rain barrel will weigh over 417 pounds when full.
- Cut the downspout that you want to divert into the rain barrel and attach a flexible hose that fits around your downspout and can be configured to insert into the rain barrel inlet hole on top.
- Point the overflow hose away from your foundation so you do not saturate the soil surrounding the foundation.

Tips for Maintenance

- Keep inflow screen clean so the barrel can accept all the water the downspout discharges.
- Check all screening for holes at the beginning of each year. Holes will allow mosquitoes to enter and breed in the water.
- The spigot on the bottom of your rain barrel is threaded in the plastic barrel wall, so be careful not to bump it with the lawn mower or torque it excessively when turning the valve on and off or when extending the discharge hose.
- Water will freeze in the barrel in the winter. By draining your barrel halfway in the winter it will freeze without damaging the barrel.